Certification of death

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Abstract

In Singapore, every deceased person must have a death certificate stating the cause of death. The death certificates are prepared from certificates of cause of death signed by medical practitioners, pathologists, coroners or inspectors of death. The death certificate is a legal document and the person who certifies the cause of death is responsible for the accuracy of the facts. Singapore has a Coroner's system and all deaths due to unnatural, violent, accidental, sudden and unknown causes must be reported to the coroner. These cases are usually subjected to post-mortem examination after which pathologist will sign the certificate of cause of death. Thus only pathologists are allowed to certify unnatural causes of death. All other categories of personnel are allowed to certify natural causes only. Any deviation will result in the certificate be rejected by the Registrar of Death and the matter referred to the Coroner. The offending doctor would be reprimanded by the court. Examples of wrong certification will be given and it is hoped that medical practitioners will not make similar mistakes. Keywords: Coroner's cases, unnatural deaths, death certification Singapore Med J 1990; Vol 31: 162-165

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